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PRICE 15 CENTS

The Country Editor

Ward Macauley

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY



Successful Rural Plays

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FARM FOLKS. A Rural Play in Four Acts, by ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS. For five male and six female characters. Time of playing, two hours and a half. One simple exterior, two easy interior scenes. Costumes, modern. Flora Goodwin, a farmer's daughter, is engaged to Philip Burleigh, a young New Yorker. Philip's mother wants him to marry a society woman, and by falsehoods makes Flora believe Philip does not love her. Dave Weston, who wants Flora himself, helps the deception by intercepting a letter from Philip to Flora. She agrees to marry Dave, but on the eve of their marriage Dave confesses, Philip learns the truth, and he and Flora are reunited. It is a simple plot, but full of speeches and situations that sway an audience alternately to tears and to laughter. Price, 25 cents.

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

The Country Editor

A Comedy in Three Acts

By

WARD MACAULEY

*Author of "Examination Day at Woodhill School,"
"Lazy Bob Parkins," "Mr. Editor," "Pollin
Picks a Wife," etc.*



PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY

1915

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SEP 22 1915

no. 1.

The Country Editor

CHARACTERS

FRANK BARTLEY	.				<i>the editor of the "Free Lance"</i>
JOSEPH SAWTELLE	.	.			<i>Pineville's leading merchant</i>
JIM HOLMAN	.	.	.	.	<i>a star reporter</i>
JOSH LARRAPEE	.	.	.	.	<i>a delinquent subscriber</i>
JOHN DAWSON	.	.	.	.	<i>a labor inspector</i>
OLIVER BUCK	.	.	.	.	<i>a lawyer</i>
MR. BOLIVAR	.	.	.	.	<i>with a proposition</i>
SCHULTZ	.	.	.	.	<i>a pressman</i>
MR. JENKINS	}	.	.	.	<i>recently wed</i>
MRS. JENKINS		.	.	.	
BESSIE SAWTELLE	.	.	.	.	<i>the merchant's daughter</i>
EMILY FAXON	.	.	.	.	<i>a clerk in Mr. Sawtelle's store</i>
MRS. PETTIGREW	.	.	.	.	<i>a source of news</i>

TIME OF PLAYING :—An hour and a half.

THE STORY OF THE PLAY

The theme of this play is a strong appeal for better journalism. Scene, a country editor's office. Mr. Bartley, the editor, believes in printing all the news truthfully, even if it hurts his own interests. The state labor department is going to prosecute Mr. Sawtelle, owner of the leading department store in town, for allowing illegal conditions on his place. Bartley refuses to suppress the news though Sawtelle and his daughter Bessie, whom Bartley loves, beg him to do so. "I wouldn't kill a story to please my best friend. I can't do it and be honest." Bessie hears some testimony from a salesgirl and appeals to her father, who begins to weaken. Bartley's telegram to his friend at the capital gets Sawtelle an extension. Prosecution will be stopped if changes are made at once. Mr. Sawtelle agrees, and all ends happily. A play presenting a stirring theme, with a funny Dutch character and two newlyweds to add to the humor.

COSTUMES, ETC.

BARTLEY. A prepossessing young man of twenty-five, with an earnest, somewhat determined bearing. Wears a business suit.

MR. SAWTELLE. Forty-five. A vigorous, sharp-eyed man, accustomed to being obeyed. Stout, with gray checked trousers and dark coat.

BESSIE. An attractive girl of twenty-two. Acts I and II, suit and hat; Act III, pretty street dress and hat.

HOLMAN. A happy-go-lucky youth of twenty-five.

LARRAPEE. Forty. A farmer, in old trousers, collarless shirt and heavy shoes.

DAWSON. A large, blustering man of thirty-five, with a gruff voice. Business suit.

BUCK. Forty. Tall and thin, with a professional manner. Immaculately dressed in a black suit.

EMILY. Twenty-two. Neatly but shabbily dressed in black skirt, white shirt-waist and apron.

BOLIVAR. Thirty-five. Flashily dressed, but this part should not be burlesqued.

SCHULTZ. Forty. A stout German, in grimy trousers, black apron, old shirt; sleeves rolled up and no collar.

MR. AND MRS. JENKINS. A very young couple, the latter in a bride-like costume of flower hat and dressy suit.

NOTE

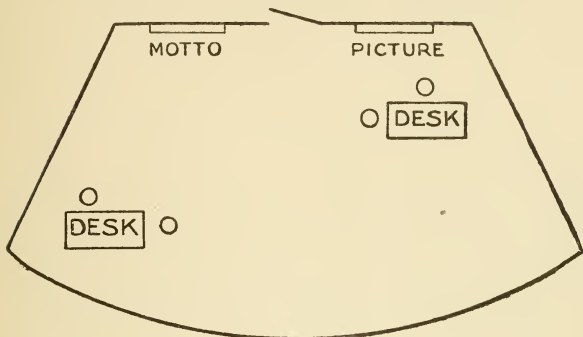
None of the costumes in the play should be ridiculous. Anything of an unduly pronounced type should be avoided.

Those who take the parts of Bartley, Bessie, and Mr. Sawtelle should study to speak their lines with great earnestness and as though vitally interested in the issue. It is essential that Bartley win the audience to his view of clean journalism.

PROPERTIES

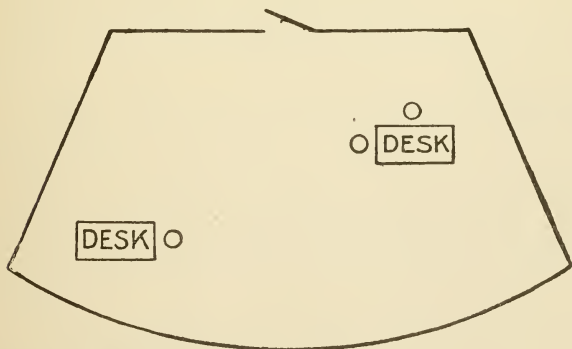
Small photograph for Bartley, newspaper and telegraph blank for Holman, document for Dawson, basket of potatoes for Larrapee, small magazine, documents and pen for Bolivar.

SCENE PLOT FOR ACTS I AND II



SCENE.—Editor's office of the Pineville "Free Lance." Editor's desk, up L., with telephone, books and papers on it. Holman's desk down R. Bookshelves about the room. Framed motto and picture of an old lady on rear wall, R. Doors R. and C.

SCENE PLOT FOR ACT III



SCENE.—Mr. Sawtelle's private office. His desk, with telephone, L. C. Table, with ledgers, papers, etc., down R. Row of shelves with files, journals, etc., in rear. Door C.



The Country Editor

ACT I

SCENE.—*Editorial room of the Pineville "Free Lance."*

(*The curtain discovers FRANK BARTLEY, in his shirt sleeves, working at his desk. He has proof sheets in his hand and his desk is piled with papers of various kinds. BARTLEY finishes his proof-reading and looks the papers over as though in search for something that is missing.*)

BARTLEY (*calling off, R.*). Oh, Jim, come here a minute.

(*After a moment, JIM HOLMAN enters, R.*)

HOLMAN. What is it, Frank?

BARTLEY (*throwing the proof sheets toward him*). Find that article about Bud Kemper's mortgaging his house so that he could buy an auto.

HOLMAN. I don't believe the "Free Lance" is carrying a story about Kemper's mortgage, Frank.

BARTLEY. The correspondent turned one in, didn't she, Jim?

HOLMAN. Why, yes, I think I did see something about it, but Bud told me he'd a little rather the "Free Lance" didn't mention the matter. Thought it might hurt his credit in town, I guess.

BARTLEY. Look here, Jim, you and I know each other pretty well. I call you Jim and you call me Frank. That's all right. But please remember that I am the editor of the "Free Lance." Don't ever kill any story without my consent.

HOLMAN. Hang it all, Frank, I didn't know the thing was so blamed important as all that. It wasn't much of an item anyway, only about four lines.

BARTLEY. Important enough for Bud to ask you to keep it out. Let me give you a pointer, Jim. Our paper's going

to be run on the square. We'll give the people the news straight.

HOLMAN. It's all right to talk, Frank. It sounds mighty heroic and all that, but wait until you've got a story that it's to your interest to kill. I'll bet it'll die a mighty sudden death. If you want to get along in this world, you want to do people favors when they ask 'em.

BARTLEY. Anyway, it's up to me, Jim. So let me see any items you are going to alter or suppress. Have you got the story of that meeting over at Benson last night?

HOLMAN. It was a frost, all right. There weren't fifty people out, and they sat in their seats like mummies. When the chairman called for three cheers for Boales, he had to make a solo of it.

BARTLEY. Let me see the story. (HOLMAN *passes him four or five large sheets of scrap paper, carelessly scribbled over. BARTLEY examines them hastily.*) Look here, Jim, this doesn't chime in with what you just told me. You said there was a cold crowd of fifty. Your story says that a mob of two hundred completely filled the hall and gave him the greatest ovation ever given a candidate in Benson. Now, I want you to write that story again. You needn't tell all you know, but all you tell must be the truth.

(HOLMAN *sits down by BARTLEY and argues earnestly with him.*)

HOLMAN. See here, Frank, Boales is our party candidate, isn't he? We've got to do the best we can for him. How would it sound to say that he got a frost up at Benson? It isn't business.

BARTLEY. It's the truth, isn't it, Jim? What's a newspaper for, even a one-horse weekly like the "Free Lance"? If a grocer sold you short weight or spoiled goods, you'd say he was dishonest, wouldn't you? How about a paper that sells news that didn't happen?

HOLMAN. Oh, go on, Frank. I thought you were an editor, not a preacher.

BARTLEY. Look at it another way. Every man up at Benson will read your article. A good many of them will know what really happened. What confidence would they have in the "Free Lance" if they read such a story as this?

(*He holds up the sheets.*)

HOLMAN. Well, that's so.

BARTLEY. Of course it's so. Then, again, when they read the "Free Lance," they'll say, "There's a square paper. It says what's so, even against its own candidates." The greatest asset a newspaper can have is the confidence of its readers.

HOLMAN (*scoffingly*). There's a bunch of them bankrupt, then.

BARTLEY. Take it back and work it over. Tell the truth without apology. It will do Boales more good than trying to lie to people who know what happened.

(*HOLMAN takes up his sheets and turns to his desk down R.*)

HOLMAN. This telling the truth is all right, old boy, but wait till some friend of yours wants you to kill a story.

(*Enter JOSH LARRAPEE, C., bearing a bushel basket of potatoes.*)

LARRAPEE. Here you be, Mr. Ed'tor. Here's a bushel o' potatoes. They're sellin' for seventy-five cents. That brings me up to a year ago last February. Mebbe later on I'll bring you some maple syrup 'n' pay for another six months.

BARTLEY. But, Mr. Larrapee, I'm boarding. What can I do with all those potatoes?

LARRAPEE. Make your landlady take 'em in trade. She uses 'em on the table every day, don't she? Well, next time you pay her, just pass 'em over the same as cash.

BARTLEY. Take 'em right out of my purse, eh?

LARRAPEE. I never did b'lieve in payin' out money much. Money's the root of all evil. I say give goods for goods as much as you can.

BARTLEY. If money is the root of all evil, Mr. Larrapee, a country newspaper office comes close to being about the most righteous place on earth. Look here. If I've got to take those potatoes, you'll have to take them over to Miss Lindley's and explain to her about this no money proposition.

LARRAPEE. I'm the man to do that. I was thinkin', Mr. Ed'tor, that you might be needin' a bit o' household goods, includin' provender, at your own place pretty soon.

BARTLEY. My own place? What are you talking about?

LARRAPEE (*winking ludicrously*). In my left eye! Don't be so innocent. You can't putend worth a red. You a-buzzin' around Bessie Sawtelle like a circular saw! If your paper printed the truth, Mr. Ed'tor, it'd say you two was engaged.

HOLMAN (*looking up from his desk*). How about that, Frank? Shall I write it up?

BARTLEY. Yes, if you can get a confirmation from Miss Sawtelle.

LARRAPEE. Sure you don't want these taken up to her place for a little weddin' present?

BARTLEY. You take them up to Miss Lindley's. Get along with you.

LARRAPEE (*taking up his basket*). I'll see you about maple syrup time, Mr. Ed'tor. An' don't forget to send the paper pretty reg'lar.

(*Exit, c.*)

BARTLEY. Jim, if this keeps up, I'm going to open a general store to sell off the stuff we get for subscriptions.

HOLMAN. Let's have an auction. By the way, shall I ask Miss Sawtelle for a confirmation of that rumor?

BARTLEY. Better let the editor do it.

(*Enter JOHN DAWSON, c.*)

DAWSON. Is the editor in?

BARTLEY. I am the editor.

DAWSON. Who's the owner or manager?

BARTLEY. I am the owner and manager.

DAWSON. I am from the State Labor Bureau.

(*He exhibits his credentials.*)

BARTLEY (*looking at the certificate with interest*). Why, here's James P. Krauss' name signed. Do you suppose that's Jim Krauss from up Belleville way?

DAWSON. That's the man, I guess. Do you know him?

BARTLEY. I should say so. His father and mine were cronies when they were boys. Well, what can I do for you?

DAWSON. You can show me through your place. That's what you can do for me.

BARTLEY. All right. Where do you want to go first—the press-room?

DAWSON. We go everywhere, see? From cellar to garret. The chief says to make a clean sweep. If you're obeying the law, well and good. If not, we're after you. I'm not particular which. I get the same pay-check either way.

BARTLEY. This way, Mr. —

DAWSON. Dawson's the name.

(*Exeunt, R. HOLMAN industriously but rather disgustedly works over the story at his desk. After a moment, enter SCHULTZ, R. Moves L. of HOLMAN's desk.*)

SCHULTZ. Hey, dere, Chim, vere is dot story vot you told me to wait for?

HOLMAN (*disgusted*). The chief made me work it over.

(*Continues writing.*)

SCHULTZ. The chief made you work him over, eh? Vell, how does he expect me to ged oudt dot newspaper on dime ven I sit aroundt after my make-ready's all ready waiting for you to vork over somedings? Vich is importanter ven a paper is being getted out—a foreman or an editor?

HOLMAN (*wearily*). Ask the chief. Take it from me, Schultzzy, I didn't want to work the thing over.

SCHULTZ (*angry*). Vell, I aind't behindt time of my own fault if I sit aroundt and wait undt look wise, while you fellers dond't like vot you write already and have to work him over. Dot's no goodt, das ist nix; nuddings, as you say, von dime's less than von.

HOLMAN. Better tell that to the chief.

SCHULTZ (*shouting*). I dond't care vot I tell it to—I know vot's vot and vot ain't. Vy shouldt I sit oudt dere waiting loafing, ven we ought to have our paper oudt, und I wait for one leetle bit of a piece of gopy. I dell anybody, der pres'dent or editor or anybody vot I dink aboutt vasting my dime.

HOLMAN. Say, Dutchy, do you want this copy?

SCHULTZ. Aind't I told you vonce already —

HOLMAN. You'd get it a lot quicker if you'll let me alone.

SCHULTZ. And vot vill I do vile I leave you alone, sit aroundt und look wise?

HOLMAN. Keep still. I had this story nearly ready when you butted in.

SCHULTZ (*looking at his watch*). Vell, I vill butt out again, but dake my word I allows you just fife minutes.

(*Exit, R.* HOLMAN *in great haste dashes off line after line. He finishes with a sigh of relief.*)

HOLMAN (*calling off R.*). Hey, there, Schultzy, she's ready for you.

(*Enter SCHULTZ, R., pantingly.*)

SCHULTZ. Am I an errandt-boy already so soon? Which is more importanter, a pressman or a reporter? (*He grabs the pages.*) Don't holdt them all day; I got a paper to get oudt, yet.

(*He starts toward door.*)

HOLMAN. Don't talk so much, then.

SCHULTZ (*coming back*). Talk so much? Who was talking so much? Nod me. I dondt say nuddings; I yust keep vorking and keep my mouth shut.

(*He turns to exit.*)

HOLMAN. What are you doing now?

SCHULTZ (*at the door*). Vot is dot your business? It is not. Dummkopf!

(*Exit, R.*)

(*Enter DAWSON and BARTLEY, R.*)

DAWSON. Cellar to garret's a quick job in this place. I guess I can give you a clean bill o' health. You have no women employees, and the law in this state lets you work men twenty-four hours a day, if you want to. Remember what I told you about leaving rags or papers in the corners. 'N' remember, I'm likely to come any time, like a thief in the night.

BARTLEY. Come whenever you like, Mr. Inspector.

DAWSON. Sawtelle's store's right on this street, I suppose?

BARTLEY. Sure. Everything in this town is right on this street. It's about a block north of here.

DAWSON (*at the door*). S'long, but remember, keep things up to the mark, because I come like a thief in the night.

(*Exit, C.*)

HOLMAN. That chap's going to make trouble, Frank. (*Takes paper and pencil from desk, and puts them in his pocket.*) Guess I'd better trot along to Sawtelle's store and hear the row.

BARTLEY. Keep your shirt on, Jim. There may not be any row.

HOLMAN. All right. I see. When there's a good story on Miss Bessie Sawtelle's father you ——

(BESSIE SAWTELLE *appears* C.)

BARTLEY (*sharply*). Shut up, Jim.

(HOLMAN *turns and sees* BESSIE.)

HOLMAN. Oh, excuse me.

(*Goes to his desk, sits, and begins to write.*)

BESSIE. Is the editor in? (*Smiles.*)

BARTLEY. Right this way. (*He leads her R., to the editor's desk.*) Mr. Editor, a lady to see you. (HOLMAN *is writing industriously at his desk. BARTLEY behind BESSIE frantically motions for HOLMAN to leave. HOLMAN pretends not to understand.*) Oh, Jim, you might interview Jerry Stockley on how it feels to live in the poorhouse.

HOLMAN. I've got the story in my pocket now.

BESSIE (*pleadingly*). But, Mr. Editor, my business is very important. I have an item which must be in the paper.

BARTLEY. But, Bessie, the paper is on the press now. Won't next week do?

BESSIE. Not for this ——

BARTLEY. Jim, go out and get space somehow for Miss Sawtelle's item.

(HOLMAN *jumps up and dashes to the press-room. Exit, R.*)

BESSIE. I knew you would do it, Frank. The ladies at the church are to have a social next Tuesday, and we knew it wouldn't be a success unless the "Free Lance" gave us a notice. Here it is.

(HOLMAN *dashes in R., closely followed by SCHULTZ.*)

SCHULTZ. I haf got a question to ask you, Mr. Bartley. Ven my make-ready is all ready und I say "let 'er sliver,"

if I haf to stop my press to put in vot der ladies is doing, my paper is late, am I to blame aind't it? You tell me.

BARTLEY. We'll take care of that.

SCHULTZ. Dot's all right, you'll take care of dot. But how does that help me gedt my paper oudt? As I vas saying, I haf godt my make-ready all ready, and then I say "go" and you say "stop," dot is absolutely nuddings. Such a doings!

BARTLEY. How does discussing the matter help, Mr. Schultz?

SCHULTZ. I know vere you are and you know vere I am, dot's how, and ven der paper is late, who is to blame, nodd der pressman, aind't it?

BARTLEY. Oh, run along, Schultzy, be a good fellow; put that item in somewhere even if you have to leave out some of that "Replies to the Love-Sick" stuff.

SCHULTZ (*taking the paper and turning to door grumblingly*). Be a goodt fellow's all righdt, but how does dot help me ven I got my make-ready all ready?

(*Exit R., mumbling, followed by HOLMAN.*)

BESSIE. I have often wondered who wrote the replies for that "Replies to the Love-Sick" column.

(*Sits at desk up L.*)

BARTLEY. Why, Jim and I write most of 'em.

BESSIE. But who is that motherly old lady whose picture is here at the top of the page?

(*Picks up paper from desk.*)

BARTLEY. Aunt Matilda? Strictly speaking, she is a figment.

BESSIE. A figment?

BARTLEY (C.). Yes, of the imagination. Isn't she a nice old lady, though? Do you know, Bessie, when I write those answers I always try to imagine that I am a nice old lady, just like that.

BESSIE. I'm afraid I shall never ask the old lady for any advice, now that I know her identity.

BARTLEY. You never can tell. (*HOLMAN enters, R., unconcernedly and seats himself at his desk down R.*) Have you covered your beat, Jim?

HOLMAN. Nothing doing now, Chief.

BARTLEY. Better look up some news.

HOLMAN (*hotly*). Well, I told you where the big story is, and you won't —

BARTLEY. Beat it, Jim.

BESSIE. Thank you so much, Mr. Editor, for putting in my article. Now I must be going. (*Rises.*)

BARTLEY. No, not yet.

BESSIE (*surprised*). Oh, yes, I must.

BARTLEY (*turning aside to HOLMAN*). Get out of here, Jim. (*To BESSIE.*) I have a business matter to speak to you about.

BESSIE. Business?

BARTLEY. Sure. Newspaper business.—Better see if you can't scrape up some news, Jim. Press day'll come 'round soon enough.

HOLMAN. Where shall I go?

BARTLEY. Go? Go anywhere, but come back with a good story. What am I paying you for, anyway?

HOLMAN. And you won't let me follow Dawson and —

BARTLEY (*patiently*). No, Jim. Not now. Beat it.

(*HOLMAN goes out slowly and as though reluctantly, c.*)

BESSIE. Now, Mr. Editor, what can I do for you?

BARTLEY. Er—everything, that is to say, a good deal. Bessie, I thought I never should get a chance to see you alone. I want to ask you something. Please sit down.

BESSIE. Is this a business matter?

(*She sits again at desk, L.*)

BARTLEY. Strictly. A story came into the office this morning concerning you.

BESSIE. Concerning me? Dear me, I hope it wasn't anything bad.

BARTLEY (*L. c.*). Some people might say it was. I think it's the best story that ever came into this office.

BESSIE. Of course, you will print it?

BARTLEY. Before we print anything, we try to get confirmation. Some papers print first and find out afterward. Then, if they are wrong, they apologize in about three lines on an inside page.

BESSIE. Dear me, don't you see that I'm just bursting with curiosity—and here you wander on and on!

BARTLEY. Well, Bessie, the story was to the effect that you are engaged to be married.

BESSIE. Indeed! And did your informant mention the name of the gentleman?

BARTLEY. One who loves you very much.

BESSIE. Did he give you his name?

BARTLEY. He said that it was the editor of the "Free Lance."

BESSIE (*rising*). Then I cannot confirm your story, Mr. Editor. It is without foundation.

BARTLEY (*pleading*). Bessie, dear, I know that very well, but I want you to make it true. That is the way in which I want you to confirm it. You know that I love you. Why, Bessie, I believe I've loved you ever since that night I struck Pineville and saw you down by the depot. There has never been any one else. There never will be.

BESSIE. Why, Frank, I thought all this talk about that story was joking. (*She is standing by desk, L.*)

BARTLEY. No, you didn't, Bessie. You know well enough that I wouldn't fool about such a thing.

BESSIE. Well, maybe I do.

BARTLEY. You are not indifferent to me, are you, Bessie?

BESSIE. Why, of course not, Frank. We have been too good friends for me to be indifferent to you.

BARTLEY. Only friends? Bessie, when I love you so much, is it to be only friends?

BESSIE. What do you wish it to be?

BARTLEY. I want you to be my wife. Listen, Bessie, I may not have much to offer you —

BESSIE. You have offered me the best thing any man can offer a girl, Frank—your love.

BARTLEY. I want you, Bessie. I need you. I've got an up-hill fight, I realize that, and I don't want to promise you that everything will be smooth sailing. It may not be.

BESSIE. What do you mean by an up-hill fight, Frank?

BARTLEY. Listen, Bessie. I want to tell you that the fight for clean journalism is the biggest problem in this country to-day.

BESSIE. Clean journalism?

BARTLEY. Yes. Whether a man is the owner of the biggest city daily or a one-horse country weekly, he has a chance to fight on the right side. I want you to understand all this before you say whether you will marry me.

BESSIE. But, Frank, what do you mean by the right side?

BARTLEY. You know what I mean. Printing the news without fear or favor. Think of how much harm I could do by printing an untrue scandal on my front page next week, even though I deny it later on. Half the people don't read the apology and most of the rest think it was true, anyway. Then an honest editor won't suppress news to please an advertiser; he won't lie for his party. Why, there's our motto right there. (*Points to motto on wall.*)

BESSIE (*reading*). "The truth—no matter whom it helps or hurts."

BARTLEY. Then an honest editor won't publish advertisements of whisky or fraudulent investments or habit-forming drugs. This paper loses a lot of money because we won't advertise fake medicines. I can't promise you, Bessie, that we shall ever be rich.

BESSIE. It doesn't seem as though one ought to want to get rich by injuring other people.

BARTLEY. That's the stuff! Spoken like the half-owner of the "Free Lance"! Now, these other fellows say that you can sell your space to anybody that can pay for it, and then he's responsible for what he puts into it.

BESSIE. But that seems reasonable.

BARTLEY (*earnestly*). No, Bessie, it isn't. When my subscribers see an ad in my paper, they feel that the "Free Lance" is backing it up. At least, I want them to feel that way. I wouldn't be in old Schemp's boots for anything. He's the editor of the "Herald" over at Shell-haven. He published a mining investment ad and one of his subscribers, a poor old woman with only a little bit of insurance money left to her name, lost over five hundred dollars.

BESSIE. Oh, I heard about that.

BARTLEY. Well, I couldn't sleep nights if I had done it, but old Schemp only said, "It wasn't my ad. I didn't have anything to do with it."

BESSIE. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

BARTLEY. So you see, Bessie, I'm frank in telling you

that I don't know what sort of future is ahead of me. The "Free Lance" is going to be clean. Whether it succeeds or not, we shall have to wait to see.

BESSIE. Oh, Frank, it's noble to try to do what you are doing.

BARTLEY (*eagerly*). Then you will say yes?

BESSIE. Oh, that is another matter altogether, Frank.

BARTLEY. But I love you, Bessie —

BESSIE. This is a very serious matter.

BARTLEY. Serious for me, I can tell you.

BESSIE. I think I ought to have some advice about it.

BARTLEY. Nonsense, Bessie dear. You know your own heart.

BESSIE (*mischievously*). Suppose I write to Aunt Matilda and see what she says.

(*Picks up paper from desk and points to picture.*)

BARTLEY (*gleefully*). Fine. I know what Aunt Matilda will say. (*He picks up a scratch block from desk.*) Come on, let's write it together.

BESSIE (*firmly*). No, let me write it. (*She sits at desk, L., and takes the tablet from his hand.*) "Dear Aunt Matilda. A young man is very much in love with me." Is that correct?

(BARTLEY stands L. C., in front of desk.)

BARTLEY. Underscore the very much.

BESSIE. "He is young but not handsome." (BARTLEY makes a wry face.) "He is a newspaper man, more interested in ideals than in making money. Shall I accept him or look further?"

BARTLEY. But she will want to know how you feel toward him.

BESSIE (*writing*). "I am not indifferent to him —"

BARTLEY. Let me see that paper. (*She rises and comes down L. He takes paper from her, though she makes a pretended effort to retain it. What he sees seems to please him immensely, for his face becomes wreathed in smiles.*) That's glorious.

(*He tries to put his arm around BESSIE, but she eludes him.*)

BESSIE. Now, Frank, not until Aunt Matilda's answer appears in the paper.

BARTLEY (*dashing off a few lines*). Pshaw—that would mean a week. Here's her answer. "Yes, marry him and help him." Now, may I confirm that story?

BESSIE (*demurely*). No, indeed. Not until I read what Aunt Matilda says in the "Free Lance."

(BARTLEY *hastily grabs both papers and rushes toward the press-room door, R.*)

BARTLEY (*at the door*). Hey, Schultzy, stop the press and work this in, if you have to leave out the biggest story you've got.

(BESSIE *comes down C.*)

SCHULTZ (*entering R.*). Good-night! Haf I got to stop my press again already? Taugennichts! Dis iss children's play. I am a man grown up already and my make-ready —

BARTLEY (*joyously*). Oh, keep still, Schultzy, and get this in, no matter what you leave out, or I'll throw a book at you. (SCHULTZ *takes the papers and exits R., grumbling*. BARTLEY *comes down L.*) The paper will be out in an hour, Bessie. Hurray for Aunt Matilda! May I come up to the house to-night?

BESSIE. Thursday night, young man. I think you have made progress enough for one day. To-morrow night's the social.

(BARTLEY *comes closer to BESSIE. She moves down L.*)

BARTLEY. Aren't you going to give me the seal of your approval?

BESSIE. You talk as if I were a notary public.

BARTLEY (*coming toward her, arms outstretched*). Yes, you know what I mean, just a little one.

BESSIE. Well, perhaps a very small one —

(BARTLEY *moves to kiss her, just as the press-room door flies open and SCHULTZ enters R.*)

SCHULTZ. Once again, I ask off you haf I got to stop my press —

BARTLEY (*picking up a book from his desk and hurling*

it at SCHULTZ). Yes, you print that Aunt Matilda stuff, if it's the only thing you print this week.

(SCHULTZ closes the door just in time to avoid being hit by the book. BESSIE has taken advantage of the opportunity to go up C.)

BESSIE *(mockingly)*. Good-bye, Mr. Editor. See you Thursday night.

(BARTLEY rushes toward her, but she exits and closes the door just as he reaches it. BARTLEY turns and shakes his fist at the press-room, comes down L., takes a picture out of his desk and kisses it fervently.)

(Enter MR. and MRS. JENKINS, C. They are very timid and confused.)

MR. J. Is this here the editor?

BARTLEY. Yes, sir. What can I do for you?

MR. J. Why—er—that is to say, nothing.

MRS. J. Why, yes he can, too, honeychum. What did you come here for, dear? *(Comes down C.)*

MR. J. I came because you brought me, darling.

(Comes down C.)

MRS. J. But why did I bring you, Jenkieboy?

MR. J. *(gathering courage)*. Why, you see—er—course you wouldn't think it, but this here lady and me was recently united in holy matrimony.

MRS. J. Married, in other words.

BARTLEY. I congratulate you, I am sure—but what can I do for you?

MRS. J. Let me tell him, Jenkieboy. We thought mebbe you'd put in a nice notice about us. You see we got married over at Hazel Falls and—and—well, we kind o' ran away from home, as you might say. Oh, it was terribly romantic, and now we're on our honeymoon, staying over at Cousin Maria Stebbins, and we haven't heard from the folks whether they will forgive us or not.

BARTLEY. Maybe they will forgive you if you promise never to do it again.

MRS. J. Oh, I hope so, I hope so. You see Jenkieboy works in his father's store, and how can we get along if he doesn't forgive us?

BARTLEY. That's so.

MRS. J. It was at the store I first met Jenkieboy. He was weighing out sugar, and he did it sort of different.

BARTLEY (*smiling*). Love at first sight, eh?

MRS. J. It was dreadfully romantic, wasn't it, Jenkieboy?

MR. J. Just as you say, love.

BARTLEY. And you want all that in the paper?

MR. J. Yes—yes, sir.

MRS. J. We thought it would be sort of romantic.

BARTLEY. Well, you walk right through that door and you'll see the man who will put the story in the paper for you.

MRS. J. Story? It isn't any story. It's true, every word of it.

BARTLEY. Tell Mr. Schultz. He loves stories like that.

(*Sits at desk, L. MRS. J. leads her husband and they exeunt R. A moment later they come out R., hurriedly, followed by SCHULTZ.*)

SCHULTZ. No, nix, nein! I vill not stop my paper to tell dot you vas chust married. Eferybody vould know dot anyways. Am I to gedt my paper out last week or next year? (*He shoves them to the door, C. They are much disturbed.*) Positifely, I vill nodt put nuddings in. 'I"ree times already have I got ready my make-ready. You shouldt haf got married sooner. Last veek, last year, den I got it in my paper.

MRS. J. Protect me, my love. Protect me.

MR. J. (*shoving her up C., toward door*). I am protect-ing you, ain't I? Let's get out of here.

(*SCHULTZ rushes at them. MRS. J. screams. They scramble through the door, C. BARTLEY laughs.*)

SCHULTZ. Next veek my last veek's paper is nodt oudt. Such doings!

(*Exit R., grumbling.*)

BARTLEY. The course of true love never did run smooth. (*Enter HOLMAN, C., excitedly. Well, Jim, what's the excitement?*)

HOLMAN (*triumphantly*). Excitement! Say, Frank, I

told you so. I've got a story now that you will want to kill, all right. (*Comes down C.*)

BARTLEY (*composedly*). What is it?

HOLMAN. Why, the labor inspector found all kinds of things wrong down at Sawtelle's. The girls work longer than the law allows, the sanitary and safety conditions aren't what they should be, and he's been violating the minimum wage law right along.

BARTLEY. Will the inspector write a complaint?

(*BARTLEY is much disturbed.*)

HOLMAN. Sure he will. The department is out to make a record. They'll have the old boy in court, all right. Hang it all. It's a big story. (*Ruefully.*) But I suppose we'll have to kill it.

BARTLEY. What makes you think we are going to kill it?

HOLMAN. Think? I know. We've got to kill it. Man alive, you're stuck on the old man's daughter, aren't you? You know Joe Sawtelle, don't you, and his daughter, too, for that matter? If we print a line about this, there'll be no wedding bells for you.

BARTLEY. Jim, the editor's personal interest must not interfere with the "Free Lance" when it comes to a matter of news.

HOLMAN. You're crazy. You'll lose Sawtelle's advertising, and —

BARTLEY (*firmly*). Write your story. We'll print it.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as Act I, the following morning. BARTLEY is at his desk writing.*

(*HOLMAN enters, c., and comes down rapidly to BARTLEY'S desk.*)

HOLMAN. That the Sawtelle story you have there?

BARTLEY. Yes.

HOLMAN. Oh, I say, Frank, forget what I said yesterday. Don't run that story. I know what this will mean to you, old boy.

BARTLEY. What will it mean, Jim?

(*HOLMAN is R. C., in front of desk.*)

HOLMAN. Why, if you print a line about the inspector's report, the "Free Lance" will lose every dollar of advertising from Sawtelle.

BARTLEY. I guess that's so.

HOLMAN. Of course. And he gives us about half of what we get. Just look at that. (*Spreads out a newspaper on the desk.*) A half page this week. Why, Frank, unless we can keep Sawtelle's account, there won't be any "Free Lance."

BARTLEY. He needs us as much as we need him, Jim.

HOLMAN. Maybe he does, and maybe he doesn't. If you get the old man mad, he will get along without us, whether he needs us or not. He's as obstinate as Bill Higgins' mule.

BARTLEY. The "Free Lance" is the only paper in town. How's he going to advertise his bargains unless he uses the "Free Lance"?

HOLMAN. You'll see. Anyway, business isn't everything. I know how things stand between you and Bessie. Do you suppose she'll marry the man that lambasts her father in his paper? Why, she will freeze you cold.

BARTLEY. I have no intention of lambasting Mr. Sawtelle, Jim.

HOLMAN. What do you call it, saying his store's not kept up decently and that he underpays his girls?

BARTLEY. Remember, Jim, it isn't I that is saying anything about his store. A public official is making a complaint. That's news. We've got to print it.

HOLMAN. You take my advice, Frank. Kill that story and everything will be lovely. If anybody asks you, you didn't know anything about it. Blame it on me. Why, you can have your girl, and you bet Sawtelle will appreciate it. You'll get more advertising than ever.

BARTLEY. To reward us for not printing the story, eh?

HOLMAN. Sure. I won't hold you to what you said yesterday. We'll just kill the whole thing and everything will be nuts and raisins.

BARTLEY. The finish, eh?

HOLMAN. Not on your life, boy, just the beginning. Look, Frank, what a chance you've got. When you are the old man's son-in-law, it will be your own fault if you don't manage the store. I only wish I had the chance you've got. (*Pauses a moment. BARTLEY does not answer, as HOLMAN continues.*) It's settled then, Frank? I kill the story?

BARTLEY (*in a determined tone*). Yes, it's settled, Jim, but the story sticks.

HOLMAN. Oh, come, Frank, be sensible.

BARTLEY. I will. Look here, Jim, suppose it was some one else who might marry Bessie if this story was killed and this some one else came to me and urged me not to print it, what would I do?

HOLMAN. That's not ——

BARTLEY (*firmly*). What would I do, Jim?

HOLMAN. Why, I suppose you'd print the story.

BARTLEY. Suppose? You know mighty well I'd print the story. Very well. What I wouldn't do for somebody else, I can't do for myself. We'll print the facts, and we'll abide by the consequences.

HOLMAN. Even if you lose Bessie?

BARTLEY (*quietly*). Even if I lose Bessie.

HOLMAN. Oh, come on, Frank, don't be foolish. Put your conscience in cold storage. Soften the story, anyway.

BARTLEY. Not a line. It's a tough situation, Jim, but I've got to do the square thing.

HOLMAN. You don't love Bessie much.

BARTLEY. Don't say that, Jim. I love Bessie too much to sell myself for advertising, or even to win her love.

HOLMAN. Go on. Be a martyr, but don't say I didn't warn you. Here are the rest of the facts. (*He lays some sheets before BARTLEY.*) There are no fire-escapes on the building, though four floors are occupied. The building has no extinguisher system. In case of fire, anybody on the top floor would be caught like a rat in a trap. There are only half enough chairs, according to the law's requirements. Moreover, on Saturdays, many of the girls work fourteen hours, when nine is the law's limit. The legal minimum wage is seven dollars a week. Mr. Sawtelle's minimum is four and a half.

BARTLEY. Why didn't the inspector warn him and give him a chance to remedy conditions?

HOLMAN. Too much of that done already, he says. They "remedy conditions" for a few weeks and then slip back into the same old ways. The department is out to stir things up, I tell you. The old man will be lucky if they don't fine him a thousand dollars.

BARTLEY. I wonder if it would do any good if I asked Krauss for an extension.

HOLMAN. Krauss?

BARTLEY. Yes, the head of the State Labor Bureau, you remember. He might put off the prosecution if Sawtelle would agree to fix things up.

HOLMAN. Sawtelle's obstinate as a mule. He won't accept any favors from them.

BARTLEY. No—not the way he feels now. But he might be brought to reason. I'll see him myself.

HOLMAN. Worth trying, I guess.

BARTLEY (*with decision*). I'll do it. Hand me a telegraph blank. (*HOLMAN takes telegraph blank from his own desk and hands it to BARTLEY. He writes rapidly, then hands telegram to HOLMAN.*) There, Jim, get that off, will you?

HOLMAN. Sure. I hope it'll work.

(*Exit, c.*)

(*BARTLEY goes on writing at his desk. After a moment, enter MR. BOLIVAR, c.*)

BOLIVAR. Is this the editor?

BARTLEY. Yes, sir.

BOLIVAR. I've got a nice little proposition to offer you, Mr. Editor.

BARTLEY. Bartley is the name.

BOLIVAR (*suavely*). Oh, yes, Mr. Bartley, to be sure. A good old name! I was instructed by a school-teacher of that name, a fine man and a learned scholar. Yes, sir. You recall him, sir, you recall him.

BARTLEY (*drily*). Thank you.

BOLIVAR (*rubbing his hands*). You are of the intellectual type, my dear sir. I am something of a phrenologist. In fact, I may well confess that I am an expert. I read human character at a glance. It is a great aid to me in my business. As I am speaking, I am reading you, the intellectual type, strong, robust.

BARTLEY. Thank you.

BOLIVAR. Clever, ambitious, large-minded, progressive. You will go far, young man, mark my words. You will be interested in what I offer. A small man wouldn't appreciate my proposition. No, sir, not for a moment.

BARTLEY. If you are referring to mining stock, sir, I am afraid I can offer you no encouragement.

BOLIVAR. Mining stock? Bless your heart, no. I am not of that ilk, I assure you. I represent the Metropolitan Rural Supplement, sir, the greatest invention of the age. (*He takes a paper resembling a small magazine from his pocket.*) Here it is. Gaze upon its beauties. My dear fellow, the big city dailies all have their big magazine supplements. Our mission is to supply something similar—only better—for the readers of country papers. Aren't the people of Pineville as good as New Yorkers? Of course they are. Then let them have their magazine supplements with their papers. Here we have it. (*He moistens his thumb on his tongue and turns the pages.*) All the fashions, household recipes, how to feed a family of nine on six dollars a week, stories by —

BARTLEY. Hold on. Who wrote that stuff about feeding a family of nine on six dollars a week?

(*Takes paper from BOLIVAR.*)

BOLIVAR (*proudly*). Junky, one of our best staff men. We pay him five thousand a year. Stories by Smithkins, Lambert, Turnbull, and all the other big ones, jokes, pictures, puzzles, rhymes for the little ones, a literary treasure-

house, my dear sir. Readers of the "Free Lance" will revel in it.

(During the latter part of BOLIVAR'S discourse, BARTLEY has been examining the supplement carefully.)

BARTLEY (*drily*). And how much are we to expend for the privilege of giving "Free Lance" readers this wonderful production?

BOLIVAR. Ah, that's the point, sir, the very crux of our proposition, if I may put it so. The supplement is supplied you without money and without price. You pay the express, nothing more. The advertisers take care of the rest. We live in an age of advertising, sir. Advertising is the greatest civilizing force known to mankind. As an ambassador for advertising, sir, I consider myself nothing less than a missionary, sir.

BARTLEY. It pays better, though.

BOLIVAR. You have a keen mind, young man. *(He takes some important looking contracts and a fountain pen from his pocket.)* How many shall we put you down for?

BARTLEY. Not a copy.

BOLIVAR. Why, why—my dear sir, I pray you, consider —

BARTLEY. Consider? I've considered enough. Look at your supplement that you want me to distribute to the good people of Pineville. *(Points to paper.)* Look at that advertisement of Elixir of Everlasting Youth, one of the worst fakes ever perpetrated and the solace of all the toppers in the dry counties. Look at that advertisement of stock in peach orchards on the Hawaiian Islands. Look at that ad about writing a song and getting famous —

BOLIVAR. What's wrong with it?

BARTLEY. Every fool who ever drummed a key will want to send them fifty dollars to publish his fool song. Will he get famous? Not on your life. Look at that moving picture college ad. "We guarantee to make you a successful photo play dramatist, earning \$50 to \$200 a week." You, mind you, anybody at all. All the poor counter jumpers at eight a week will send their dollars to learn how to have a snap! And here we have a whisky ad! No, sir, the "Free Lance" doesn't publish advertising of that kind, thank you.

(Throws paper on desk in front of BOLIVAR.)

BOLIVAR (*sardonically*). All right, young fellow, but let me tell you one thing before I go. You made a great big mistake in choosing your profession. (*Picks up paper.*)

BARTLEY (*curtly*). How so?

BOLIVAR. You'd ought to have been a preacher. Well, so long. I'll come and see the fellow who buys you out, when you go bankrupt.

BARTLEY. You'll have a long wait.

(*Exit BOLIVAR, C., contemptuously. BARTLEY resumes his writing at his desk.*)

(*Enter JOSEPH SAWTELLE, C. He is very genial.*)

SAWTELLE. Hard at work, my boy? That's right. Work hard when you're young and you'll have plenty when you're old. That's my way.

(*BARTLEY rises and goes C., to meet SAWTELLE.*)

BARTLEY. Won't you have a chair, sir?

(*Places chair, C.*)

SAWTELLE. Thanks, I will rest a minute. (*Sits.*) Have you been by the store to-day? Crowded, crowded to the doors. That ad did it. I always believe in the "big spread." When you want to say anything say it out loud. I'm coming back next week with twice the space. That's what I came over for. I want you to reserve the whole back page for me until forbid. That means prosperity for both of us. These bargain days do the trick. When you're out at noon, just take a look in.

BARTLEY. I will. And thanks for the ad, too. It isn't often that a man brings a full page ad into a newspaper office. Usually we have to go after it, and then it's like pulling teeth.

SAWTELLE. Bessie says you are coming up Thursday night. We'll be glad to see you, glad to see you any time. I like a strong, upstanding, clean-cut fellow.

BARTLEY. Thank you, sir.

SAWTELLE (*rising*). I will send up the copy for that ad within a day or so. We'll want to see proof.

BARTLEY (*L. C.*). We'll get it to you, sir. I'll come over for the copy any time you say.

SAWTELLE. To-morrow. By the way, Frank—I hope you don't mind my calling you Frank?

BARTLEY. Not at all, sir.

SAWTELLE. Well, Frank, a deputy labor commissioner was in town yesterday and he made some very uncalled-for remarks. In fact, he was extremely disagreeable. I'd a little rather nothing appeared in the "Free Lance" about the matter. The best way is to ignore such fellows, not condescend to recognize them.

BARTLEY. But, Mr. Sawtelle, they tell me he's making an official report. If so it's news. Isn't it true?

SAWTELLE. I don't think any one in Pineville cares two flaps of a pancake what any inspector says about Sawtelle's store.

BARTLEY. But, Mr. Sawtelle, he says that you have violated the minimum wage law, that you pay some of the girls only four dollars and a half a week.

SAWTELLE (*hotly*). It's a lie. Not one of them gets less than four seventy-five.

BARTLEY. But the law sets a minimum of seven dollars.

SAWTELLE (*conciliatingly*). Look here, Frank, that law was intended for big cities where the girls have to pay board and buy their own clothes. Here at Pineville the girls just live at home.

BARTLEY. It is a general state law, I think.

SAWTELLE. Anyway, what business is it of a lot of these cheap lawyers who go up to Belleville to make laws for the rest of us? Let some of them try to keep a store running and pay seven dollars a week to green girls that don't know putty. Why, how would I be able to have all these bargain sales and give the people stuff at cost, almost, if I had to pay seven dollars a week for clerks?

BARTLEY. Do you mean to say, Mr. Sawtelle, that you are able to make bargains because you underpay your clerks?

SAWTELLE. Underpay? Who said underpay? Most of 'em aren't worth what they get. No, I can't say we make bargains out of salaries, anyway. The game is this, my boy. Cut the prices on a half a dozen things people know about and charge a good big profit on your other stuff. Anyway, I'm not going to let them dictate to me. As for the "Free Lance," it will please me a great deal not to see the matter mentioned.

BARTLEY. I am afraid I can't do that.

SAWTELLE (*surprised*). Why not?

BARTLEY. It's news. I must print the report. I will be very glad to print your side, too.

SAWTELLE. But, my boy, don't you see? A lot of people won't understand. It will put me in a bad light. The girls will be dissatisfied. And, in a way, it will seem a sort of disgrace.

BARTLEY. But, Mr. Sawtelle, it is news. I must print it.

SAWTELLE. Why, you wouldn't want to hurt Bessie, would you? Have people pointing at her in the street? It's a little thing for you to make such a fuss about.

BARTLEY. Let me have your story to print, too. That's fair. I'll print the inspector's charges, and right alongside I'll print your answer.

SAWTELLE (*severely*). I think it will be a great deal better not to mention the matter in any way.

BARTLEY. I can't do that.

SAWTELLE. Yes, you can, Frank, and I didn't size you up as a man who would injure his friends.

BARTLEY. Look here, Mr. Sawtelle, I wouldn't kill a story to please my best friend. I can't do it and be honest. Ought I to do it to please myself?

SAWTELLE. These ideals are very fine, my dear boy, very fine, but you are young, very young. You will come to recognize that you are up against a hard, cold world, and that you've got all you can do to keep going. Pay the girls seven dollars a week? Why, I'd be tickled to pay them twenty—if I could. I've got to meet business conditions as they are.

BARTLEY. Are you going to give the girls seven dollars now?

SAWTELLE. Not much, I'm not. The law is unconstitutional, anyway. It limits the right of contract. Why, the free right to contract is the most sacred of human liberties, Frank.

BARTLEY. Do you want me to say that in the "Free Lance"?

SAWTELLE (*his jaws snapping*). No, I don't. I've told you what I want, and I've tried to be reasonable, too. I don't want a line of it in the "Free Lance," not a line.

BARTLEY. I can't do that.

SAWTELLE (*angrily*). Then you can do the other thing.

If the "Free Lance" doesn't want Sawtelle and Company's friendship, and our business, all right. But we don't stand any knocks from any one.

BARTLEY. Can't you see how it is, Mr. Sawtelle? I've got to print the news. Let me print your story, too.

SAWTELLE. If you know what's best for you, young man, you won't print a line about it. I don't want my family disgraced in your paper.

BARTLEY. Why didn't you think about that when you were violating the law?

SAWTELLE. It's a fool law, I tell you. (*Goes up c.*)

BARTLEY. Then why be ashamed of violating it?

SAWTELLE. Look here, I'm not going to listen to any boy telling me what to do. I've made a very small, simple request. If you don't want to favor me, well and good. That is your affair.

BARTLEY. I can't do it. (*Goes up l. c.*)

SAWTELLE. That's final, is it?

BARTLEY. I'm afraid it is, sir.

SAWTELLE. Very well. Good-morning, sir. (*He pauses at the door.*) By the way, we won't need that page in the "Free Lance" next week. There will be no bargain sale at Sawtelle's.

BARTLEY (*quietly*). Very well, sir.

(SAWTELLE *flies out, angrily*. BARTLEY, *down l.*, *buries his head in his hands, in a momentary reaction*. *He takes BESSIE'S picture from his pocket and kisses it fervently.*)

(*Enter MRS. PETTIGREW, c.*)

MRS. P. I've got some news for you, Mr. Editor.

BARTLEY (*taking pad and pencil from desk up l.*). You have, madame?

MRS. P. Yes, and I ain't going to charge you a cent for it, either. I heard from a good, reliable source that young Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins are having considerable difficulty already—I mean domestic difficulty.

BARTLEY. Indeed?

MRS. P. Yes, sir, 'n' it wouldn't be surprisin' if she sued him for divorce on the grounds o' cruelty—extreme cruelty. Last night he threw a plate at her, struck her right on the head, too.

BARTLEY. You know this to be a fact?

MRS. P. Of course I do.

BARTLEY. She told you? Or were you an eye-witness?

MRS. P. Well, no, but I'm morally sure. I heard the sound of the dish smashing and I seen Mrs. Jenkins cryin'. So I put two and two together and I guess that always makes four. She ought to get a divorce from that man. Any man who'd throw a dish at a woman —

BARTLEY. But, Mrs. Pettigrew, you haven't proven that yet. Jenkins always seemed to me a peaceable chap.

MRS. P. That's only a mask, hypocrisy. How I hate hypocrisy! He calls her "dear" and "honey" in company and then throws dishes at her when they're alone.

BARTLEY. You think, then, that the "Free Lance" would be justified in hinting at divorce proceedings?

MRS. P. Well, I whispered a word to Lawyer Buck, and he's going to ask Mrs. Jenkins if she's got any business with him. You can take my word for it.

BARTLEY. Very well. We will print the story and quote you as our authority.

MRS. P. Goodness gracious, you mustn't do that!

BARTLEY. Why not? We must give the source of our information.

MRS. P. Don't you dare drag my name into it, whatever you do.

BARTLEY. I am afraid I shall have to print the story with you as authority.

MRS. P. Don't you do any such thing, young man.

BARTLEY. You came to us of your own accord.

MRS. P. Don't get me mixed up in it.

BARTLEY. You mixed yourself up in it.

MRS. P. Anyway, perhaps, well—er—maybe it would be better to wait for further developments.

BARTLEY (*sternly*). Better to wait until there's some truth in it, you mean. In future, I advise you not to carry tales you can't back up. Anyway, don't bring them here.

MRS. P. (*angrily*). No one asked you for any advice, upstart! (*She flounces out, c.*)

BARTLEY. Phew, what a pleasant morning!

(*Comes down c.*)

(Enter SCHULTZ, R.)

SCHULTZ. Excuse me, Mister Bartley, I got somedings I vish to say. (*He pauses and seems embarrassed.*)

BARTLEY. Out with it, Schultz. You aren't going to press now, are you?

SCHULTZ. No, but — (*Comes down L. C.*)

BARTLEY. I've got a big story —

SCHULTZ. Dot's him.

BARTLEY. What are you talking about?

SCHULTZ. Dot big story. Don't you write him. My age is yours a couple of times. Take my advice, say nuddings.

BARTLEY (*amused*). Why not?

SCHULTZ. A wise tongue in a still head, ain't it? You never got into troubles ven you say nuddings. Take my wife —

BARTLEY (*laughing*). I positively refuse.

SCHULTZ. You can haf her fur vot she's cost me. But anyways, d' odder night she called me a fool with a few words ahead of der fool and let me tell you, dot started somedings. And fer why? She didn't keep still. If she hadn't said nuddings, I vould haf smoked my pipe and eferything vould be lofely, and I vould not now haf a sore head (*he feels it ruefully*), and my vife she vould not haf a sore thumb.

BARTLEY. Sometimes you have to speak, though.

SCHULTZ. I vould nefer say nuddings against my customers. Take Maloney up the street. I buy my groceries off of him. Is it any business of his if I beat my vife or she beats me?

BARTLEY. Why, no, but —

SCHULTZ. If he knows it, he keeps still aboutt it, unless I go buy my stuff over to Morgan's.

BARTLEY. But, Mr. Schultz, a newspaper is different.

SCHULTZ. Nuddings is different, positifely nix. It's all business. Never knock a customer. Dake my advice. I am your age a couple of times over.

BARTLEY. I'm much obliged, Mr. Schultz, but I'm afraid I'll have to decide this question for myself.

SCHULTZ. Dot's right. Decide him for yourself, but do it the vay I toldt you.

BARTLEY (*smiling*). I'm afraid not —

SCHULTZ. You think him over and remember, nefer knock a customer.

(*Exit, R.*)

(*Enter BESSIE, C.*)

BESSIE (*hurrying down to BARTLEY, anxiously*). Why, Frank, what is the matter? I just met father in the street, and he is so angry with you. He was almost beside himself.

BARTLEY. Come here, Bessie. Sit down and let me tell you about it. (*He sits at his desk, L., she on the other chair, R. C., in front of desk.*) It's all about what we were discussing yesterday. I am trying to run the "Free Lance" honestly, and publish the news without fear or favor.

BESSIE. But, Frank, father said you were trying to disgrace us all, and he asked me never to speak to you again.

BARTLEY. Listen, Bessie, he has asked me to suppress a story—a very important story—for two reasons, first because he is a big advertiser, and secondly because he says it will hurt you.

BESSIE. But, Frank, you wouldn't do anything to hurt me, to disgrace me, would you?

BARTLEY. You know I wouldn't, Bessie. I haven't done anything, have I? All I am going to do is to print what happened. Your father seems to think that the disgrace lies not in doing wrong, but in people's knowing about it.

BESSIE (*proudly*). I don't think my father would do anything wrong.

BARTLEY. Then why is he afraid of having this story printed?

BESSIE. He has been accused unjustly. You can't make me believe that he oppresses those girls who work for him. I just won't believe it.

BARTLEY. Bessie, listen. I don't accuse your father of anything. All I insist upon doing is printing the fact that a state official has brought charges regarding the conduct of the store. Then I offered to print your father's reply. The "Free Lance" would take no sides in the matter.

BESSIE. But people will talk about us. If you could only realize how I hate that, Frank. I think you might drop the whole thing. You would, too, if you loved me.

BARTLEY. Bessie, don't say that. Listen, the girls down in those big cities (*swinging his arm toward the south*) were

being made to work for starvation wages, three and four dollars a week in those big stores and factories. Little children were employed, too, because they were cheap. Why was it permitted?

BESSIE. Yes, why?

BARTLEY. 'To uphold liberty of contract. Yes, the liberty of contract to starve. Men and women began to agitate and after many years, out of it all, we have our new law that compels a fair wage, that prohibits child labor and says that women must not work more than fifty hours a week.

BESSIE. That was only intended for the big cities. Father said so.

BARTLEY. Men are trying to evade the law. They want it declared unconstitutional. The state labor department is only trying to enforce the law. Now, when a complaint is made against Sawtelle's, I mustn't say a word about it. Bessie, would I be a man if I did this thing because of my personal interest?

BESSIE. But think, Frank, just think of getting us talked about. If you love me as you say you do, you would prefer anything to that.

BARTLEY. You don't understand.

BESSIE. I'm afraid I do. I understand only too well. You are more interested in this law than you are in me.

(*Rises.*)

BARTLEY (*rising*). Don't be unjust, Bessie.

BESSIE. Unjust? It is you that are unjust. Unjust, unreasonable, obstinate——

BARTLEY. Go on, go on. I can stand it, but remember, Bessie, I am getting all this because I am trying to do what is right.

BESSIE. Let's not quarrel about it, Frank. Come, say you won't print it and I'll talk to father, and maybe he will give the girls seven dollars a week and——

BARTLEY. I can't do it, Bessie.

BESSIE. You can, too, but you don't want to, Frank. Your love must mean a great deal to you when you won't do that much for me. Very well. Have it your own way. But you can't expect to marry a girl whose father is humiliated in your paper. Good-bye.

BARTLEY (*very seriously*). Good-bye.

(BESSIE pauses at the door as though expecting that he will call her back. BARTLEY sorrowfully follows to the door and gazes at her retreating figure down the street. He lingers until she has disappeared, then returns to his chair, kisses her picture fervently, buries his face in his hands momentarily, recovers himself, grasps paper and pencil and with a determined air writes feverishly.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*Private office of the Sawtelle store, the following morning. SAWTELLE is seated at his desk, working over some papers and letters. His manner betrays his nervousness and irritation.*

(*Enter OLIVER BUCK, C. He coughs respectfully two or three times to attract SAWTELLE'S attention.*)

BUCK. I got your message, sir.

SAWTELLE (*testily*). Don't I know it? Wasn't I on this end of the wire when you got it?

BUCK. Yes, sir.

SAWTELLE. Don't come prating about "I got your message." Frankly, you lawyers frequently make me tired.

BUCK. I am sorry, sir. Possibly my visit is inopportune. You are busy. I will come later.

(*He turns as though to withdraw.*)

SAWTELLE (*roaring*). Stay where you are. What do you think I called you up for if I wanted to see you next week? Sit down. (BUCK *pulls up a chair, meantime keeping his distance as though afraid of SAWTELLE.*) This pop-injay, Bartley, is giving me a lot of trouble, Buck.

BUCK (*whistling softly*). What's he up to?

SAWTELLE. He's printing a lot of stuff about me.

BUCK. I didn't see anything in the "Free Lance" about you except your ad.

SAWTELLE. It isn't in yet. That's what I want you for. An ounce of prevention is what I'm after. We've simply got to stop him, that's all.

BUCK. What's it all about, anyway?

SAWTELLE. One of these Paul Prys that gets an easy living out of the State Labor Bureau came around sticking his nose into other people's business.

BUCK. Stuck it into your store, eh?

SAWTELLE. You're right. A pretty pass when a man can't run his own business the way he wants to. Anyway, this fellow's going to make a complaint against Sawtelle and

Company. He says our safety and sanitary arrangements don't come up to the mark. Also, he says we've got to pay all these girls seven dollars a week. 'This upstart Bartley got hold of the story and he says he's going to print it.

(BUCK *whistles softly.*)

BUCK. I thought Bartley was sweet on your girl.

SAWTELLE. So he is, but he says it's his duty to print that story no matter what happens.

BUCK. Did you—er—er—suggest to him that S. and Company might not see their way clear to continue advertising in the "Free Lance"?

SAWTELLE. I didn't suggest anything. I told him mighty plain that he'd never get another dollar out of us.

(BUCK *whistles softly.*)

BUCK. And—er—er—you say this made no impression?

SAWTELLE. Not a dent. That boy doesn't know what he's up against. 'This is business, and when I make up my mind on anything I usually get it.

BUCK. Just so, just so; and—er—er—you wish me to help you get it?

SAWTELLE. I want you to make that young man understand that if he prints anything libelous I'll sue him. Tell him we'll sue him anyway. Tell him we'll get an injunction. Tell him anything —

BUCK. Leave it to me. I think I can make the young man see the light. If he does so, I presume you might enlarge your advertising appropriation a bit, eh?

SAWTELLE. Use your discretion. (BUCK *picks up his hat and prepares to withdraw.*) And remember, Buck, I want quick action, and no more of this "I got your message" nonsense.

BUCK. Yes, sir. Leave it to me.

(*Exit BUCK, C. SAWTELLE turns once more to his letters and papers but his manner shows that he is nervous and preoccupied. He fingers a letter and throws it impatiently on the desk, then picks up another, only to handle it in a like manner. This continues for a moment, until BESSIE enters, C.*)

SAWTELLE. Hello, Bessie. Has that young man of yours experienced a change of heart yet?

BESSIE. Father, you know I haven't seen him since yesterday. All he would say then was that he must do his duty.

SAWTELLE. I'm glad you're through with him for good and all. A fine kind of friend he is! Ready to disgrace the family of the girl he loves just to satisfy some foolish notion.

BESSIE. But, father, there's one thing I hardly understand —

SAWTELLE (*smiling in spite of himself*). Only one thing?

BESSIE. Only one I'm thinking about now. You haven't said that Frank was going to print anything that wasn't true. I can't see why that will disgrace us, because I know you wouldn't do anything that isn't right.

SAWTELLE (*patiently*). Listen, Bessie. (*She sits L. C., by his desk.*) I may be doing what I think is right, but other people wouldn't understand. You see, the legislature passed this law intending to remedy conditions in the big cities. It wasn't meant for places like Pineville at all.

BESSIE. It wasn't?

SAWTELLE. No, indeed. I'd just like to show you some of the big stores in the city. You'd see how different our store is. Why, we are good to our clerks. We treat them fine.

BESSIE (*enthusiastically*). I'm sure you do.

SAWTELLE. This inspector has got to do something to keep his job. If he didn't enter a complaint, they'd say he wasn't doing anything, see?

BESSIE (*doubtfully*). Yes, I see.

SAWTELLE. He just happened to swoop down on us. Going to make an example of us, he says. I'll show him what he's up against. Buck says the law's unconstitutional, and I'm not going to stand for other people running my business.

BESSIE. But, dad, you said —

SAWTELLE. Don't talk as though you were sticking up for Frank. If you do, I'll get mad.

BESSIE. I'm not sticking up for anybody. But you said this law was all right for the big cities.

SAWTELLE. Sure, they need it down there.

BESSIE. If you had the law declared unconstitutional, the girls in the stores in the big cities would suffer, wouldn't they?

SAWTELLE. I can't help that.

BESSIE. Yes, you can, dad. Don't let us be the means of those girls getting less wages.

SAWTELLE. If I don't get it declared unconstitutional, they can make me live up to it. They can fine me a thousand dollars or even put me in jail.

BESSIE (*shuddering*). Oh, they wouldn't do that!

SAWTELLE. Wouldn't they? I'm not so sure about that.

BESSIE. Promise me, dad, that you won't do anything to make things worse for the girls in the city.

SAWTELLE. If I don't I'll have to obey the law. You don't understand, Bessie. We business men have to do a lot of things we don't like to. I'd like to pay my clerks a hundred dollars a week—if I could. I've got to buy labor as cheap as my competitor or I can't sell as cheap.

BESSIE. Why, father, there isn't another store like ours in Pineville.

SAWTELLE. People can go over to Glenhaven, can't they? It seems to me, Bessie, that you ought to try to see things the way I do. Take my word for it.

(BESSIE rises, and goes R.)

BESSIE. I've got to think for myself, father, but you needn't be afraid that I won't stick up for you. I don't think Frank ought to print that story, and I shall never forgive him if he does, but ——

SAWTELLE. Then there is a "but"?

(A knock is heard at the door. BUCK enters. Seeing BESSIE, he whistles softly. He then coughs apologetically.)

BUCK. Shall I come later?

SAWTELLE (*irritably*). No, sit down. Bessie knows all about this affair. What did he say?

(BUCK sits, L. C.)

BUCK. He positively refused to be interviewed; listened to me, said "Thank you," and turned to his writing.

SAWTELLE. Did he give you any assurance that the story would not appear?

BUCK. He didn't give me any assurance about anything. He let me do the talking.

SAWTELLE. And you said, "Leave it to me."

BUCK. My private opinion is that as the case now stands, the story will appear.

SAWTELLE (*rising angrily*). I tell you, Buck, that story must not appear. I don't care what you do. Do anything. I've built up a good name for myself and my family in this town and I simply won't stand being roasted in a newspaper. Did you tell him we'd enjoin him?

BUCK (*rising*). Yes.

SAWTELLE (*impatiently*). What did he say?

BUCK. He said he understood the courts were open.

SAWTELLE. The impudent upstart! I'll make Judge Swart stop that paper.

BUCK. He can't stop it.

SAWTELLE. Why can't he stop it?

BUCK. Not as long as the story is true. Bartley says he will print only the inspector's report. You can't stop that.

SAWTELLE. I don't care what you do. Buy his paper. Do anything, but you must stop that story.

BUCK. Will you comply with the law?

SAWTELLE (*roaring*). No, sir. I'll be ——

BESSIE. Father!

SAWTELLE. ——switched if I will. I'm obstinate, I am. I wouldn't ——

BUCK. It would be cheaper than buying his paper.

SAWTELLE. I won't give in to him, nor to that inspector, either. Give him ten thousand dollars for his paper, if you have to. It isn't worth five.

BUCK. Leave it to me.

SAWTELLE. Don't come back saying you did all the talking, either.

BUCK. That's all right. Just leave it to me.

(*Exit, c.*)

SAWTELLE (*coming down c.*). When he came in you were saying there was a "but."

BESSIE (*down r.*). I don't want you to think I am standing up for Frank.

SAWTELLE. You are, though.

BESSIE (*stamping her foot*). I am not. Just the same, it seems to me he is pretty brave to do what he thinks is right when he knows it may ruin his paper and——and ——

SAWTELLE. And lose you, you mean. Call it brave if you want to.

BESSIE. Yes, father, brave and obstinate.

SAWTELLE (*perking up his ears*). Obstinate, eh? Anyway, we are through with him forever.

BESSIE (*very seriously*). Yes, dad, we are through with him forever.

(*A knock is heard at the door, c.* BESSIE turns and admits EMILY FAXON. *She is timid and hesitating.*)

EMILY. Excuse me, sir. I didn't know you were busy.

SAWTELLE. Bessie will excuse me a moment. What is it? (*Goes up c.*)

EMILY. I wanted to ask you if I could get off to-day, sir.

SAWTELLE. I guess so. We don't seem to be overburdened with trade. Is it something important?

EMILY. Why, yes, yes, sir. That is, I think it is very important. My father is very ill, sir.

BESSIE (*concernedly*). Your father ill?

EMILY. Yes, ma'am. He is very ill.

SAWTELLE. Why, of course we'll excuse you, Emily. Run along and see what you can do at home.

EMILY. I don't know whether I can be back to-morrow, sir.

SAWTELLE (*smiling*). That's all right, Emily. Run along. We'll manage somehow.

BESSIE. Has your father been sick long, my dear?

EMILY. About three months. The doctor (*her voice breaks*) says he isn't going to get better.

BESSIE. You poor girl! And how do you get along?

(EMILY stares at her open-eyed.)

EMILY. Not very well, ma'am.

BESSIE. I mean, who earns the money to keep you going?

EMILY. I do.

BESSIE. } You?

SAWTELLE. }

EMILY. Yes, sir; yes, ma'am. Since dad took sick they've had to kind o' depend upon me. We had a little saved up, though. Thank you, sir. I must be going. I'll

be back, Mr. Sawtelle, just as soon as I can. Thank you, sir, and please excuse me interrupting.

(She exits timidly, c.)

BESSIE. Father, how much do you pay that girl?

SAWTELLE. She's been here only six months. She gets four seventy-five, I suppose. *(Comes down c.)*

BESSIE. Four seventy-five! And they've had to "kind o' depend upon" her. Why, dad dear, I thought you said that these things affect only the girls in the big cities.

SAWTELLE *(uncomfortably)*. This is an extreme case, Bessie. I contribute regularly to the poor fund to take care of such unfortunates.

BESSIE. Dad, dear, I don't want you to be angry. I know you always do what you think is right —

(A knock is heard, but BESSIE and SAWTELLE do not heed it.)

SAWTELLE *(rising angrily)*. What I think is right, Bessie? What do you mean by such nonsense? *(BUCK enters just in time to hear SAWTELLE'S last words. He whistles softly and then coughs respectfully. SAWTELLE, impatiently.)* You back? Well, what did he say?

BUCK. Said he'd sell.

SAWTELLE *(mollified)*. That's better. How much does he want for the place?

BUCK. Sixty-five hundred.

SAWTELLE. It isn't worth it, but I'll pay it to stop that story. When will he give possession?

BUCK. Next Thursday.

SAWTELLE. Thursday? Look here, Buck, the "Free Lance" comes out on Wednesday.

BUCK. I know that.

SAWTELLE. And the story will be in! Why, after next Wednesday I wouldn't give ten cents for the whole thing. *(Goes L.)*

BUCK. I couldn't budge him. He says that neither love nor money can buy the "Free Lance" until next Thursday. I started raising the price, but he only said: "Excuse me, Mr. Buck, this is not an auction." Then he bowed me out.

SAWTELLE. And you said, "Leave it to me"! I'll get

that upstart down here and I'll have it out with him. (*He turns to the telephone.*) Give me number sixteen. . . . Hello, "Free Lance." That you, Bartley? This is Sawtelle. Can you come to the office right away? . . . No, I can't. . . . You come over here. . . . (*He puts down receiver.*) He's coming. Very lamb-like, too. (*He turns ferociously on BUCK.*) You leave it to me.

BUCK (*whistling softly*). I'm agreeable. Good-morning.

(*Exit, c.*)

BESSIE. Dad, I want you to promise me that you won't try to have that law declared unconstitutional. Why, dad, it would be better for us to go out of business than to do so much harm to so many people.

SAWTELLE (*coming down c.*). Then I'll have to pay every girl in the place seven dollars.

BESSIE. You could pay the difference for a long time out of the money you were going to pay for the "Free Lance."

SAWTELLE. That isn't the idea. I don't want other people running my business.

BESSIE. You want to run Frank's business.

SAWTELLE. That's different. Look here, Bessie, don't you stand up for Frank. You'll make me mad.

BESSIE. Leave Frank out of it, dad. I don't think he ought to publish that story, but neither do I think we ought to refuse to live up to the law—not after I saw Emily. I'm going up to her house now to see if I can do anything. Besides, I mustn't be here when Frank comes. (*She goes to SAWTELLE affectionately.*) Remember, dad, we're pals, no matter what happens.

(*She kisses him affectionately and exit, c.* SAWTELLE *turns to his desk. He is not so impatient as he was, but more thoughtful. After a moment BARTLEY enters, c.*)

BARTLEY. You wished to see me?

SAWTELLE. Didn't I say so over the telephone? Look here, young man, are you going to stop that nonsensical story, or aren't you?

BARTLEY. I've tried to explain. You surely don't think I enjoy printing that story?

SAWTELLE (*conciliatingly*). Don't do it, then. Nobody will know. Take the easy path, my boy. (*Sits at desk.*)

BARTLEY. I can't—I can't do it. I said I'd be honest, and I can't stop just because the first test hurts me.

SAWTELLE. Have you planned how you will get along without Sawtelle and Company?

BARTLEY. Maybe I can't. I can only try. Anyway, I'll have a clear conscience.

SAWTELLE. That won't pay your bills, my boy. I like to see a man square, but his first duty is to his friends.

BARTLEY. To shield them when they break the law? Won't you try to see my side of this, Mr. Sawtelle?

SAWTELLE. You haven't got any side. You might just as well say nothing about this matter.

BARTLEY. Will you comply with the law?

SAWTELLE. I tell you that law is unconstitutional. It interferes with the right of contract, one of the most sacred rights we have.

BARTLEY. Shall I print your views along that line, sir?

SAWTELLE. No, sir. I don't want you to print anything about it—not a word. People will put a wrong construction on it. Come now, Frank, be sensible. Why should you want to disgrace us?

BARTLEY. I don't want to, sir. I can't see why you are afraid of my printing what you have done, if you feel justified. Let me print your own statement, too.

SAWTELLE. Not a line. If you print a word about it, Sawtelle and Company are through with the "Free Lance" forever.

BARTLEY. I'm sorry, sir.

SAWTELLE (*rising and going to BARTLEY*). Look here, Frank, I'm obstinate. You can't buck me.

BARTLEY. I don't want to buck you, sir.

SAWTELLE. I think you are obstinate, too.

BARTLEY. Why don't you agree to conform to the law? If I could print that, the story wouldn't sound so bad.

SAWTELLE. I don't approve of any such law. I think a man ought to be allowed to run his own business.

BARTLEY. We can gain nothing by discussing the matter, sir. You say you are obstinate. I guess I am, too.

(*Exit, C.*)

(*A knock is heard. Enter MR. and MRS. JENKINS.*)

SAWTELLE (*brusquely*). You want to see me personally?

MR. J. (*up c.*). Why, yes—yes, sir ——

SAWTELLE (*up l.*). Don't stammer, young man, out with it. What can I do for you?

MRS. J. Why, you see, sir, we were married quite recently.

SAWTELLE. Very recently, I should say.

MR. J. Yes, sir.

SAWTELLE. I presume that you are intending to purchase a little outfit. Is that the idea?

MRS. J. Yes, sir.

SAWTELLE. I'll have Mr. Sidkins show you. We can fit you out all right ——

MRS. J. But that ain't all we want.

SAWTELLE. No?

MRS. J. No; you see, as you might say, we sort o' ran away from home, and we haven't heard from the folks whether they'll forgive us or not ——

SAWTELLE (*brusquely*). How can I do anything for you?

(*Comes down l.*)

MRS. J. (*following him*). Well, you see, we thought, Jenkieboy and I did, that maybe you'd give him a job in your grocery department—he's had a lot of experience—and then we'd buy our things from you and you could take it out of his salary.

(*MR. J. comes down r.*)

MR. J. There ain't two men in the state better'n me when it comes to weighing out sugar.

SAWTELLE. You'll have to come in later. I'm so busy I don't know whether I'm afoot or on horseback.

(*A knock is heard. Enter DAWSON, c.*)

DAWSON. 'Scuse me, I didn't know you were busy.

(*MRS. J. turns and confronts DAWSON with a cry of recognition.*)

MRS. J. Why, father, what are you doing here?

DAWSON (*gruffly*). It'd be more like it if I was to ask you what you're doing here. (*Comes down c.*)

MRS. J. (*very dignified*). Father, let me introduce my husband, Mr. Jenkins.

DAWSON. Aw, cut that, Grace; I've known Sid Jenkins since he was a polliwog.

MRS. J. Oh, you will forgive us, won't you, papa?

DAWSON. What can't be cured must be endured, I expect. As your father said (*turning to Mr. J.*) the least said soonest mended.

MR. J. Thank you, sir; then you think that father —

DAWSON. Sure; take the first train back and sneak in the back way, and start selling soap just as if nothing happened.

MRS. J. It has been dreadfully romantic, papa.

DAWSON. Scatter along, now. I've got business with Mr. Sawtelle here. You won't think it's so blamed romantic when you're scrubbing the floor and washing dishes —

MRS. J. Come on, Jenkieboy.

DAWSON. There's a train in just one hour. I'll meet you at the depot.

(*Exeunt Mr. and Mrs. J., c., very loving and happy.*)

SAWTELLE (*angrily, to Dawson*). What are you after now? Spying around trying to run a man's business for him, eh?

DAWSON. No, sir, I'm not. I was sent here by the department.

SAWTELLE (*down L.*). I wish you and your department were in the middle of the creek.

DAWSON (*drily*). Sorry we can't accommodate you. I've been talking on the 'phone to the chief. He instructed me to say that you are to be given an opportunity to comply with the law. If you meet its provisions within ten days, I am instructed that no complaint will be made.

SAWTELLE. Somebody interceding for me, eh?

DAWSON. They don't take me into their confidence. It's all the same to me. Mebbe your state senator got busy with the department. It's up to you. Do as you like. I'd just as soon make a complaint, just as soon not.

SAWTELLE. The law's unconstitutional.

DAWSON. Mebbe. I wouldn't want to risk sitting behind the bars on whether it is or not. It's up to you. I get my pay envelope either way.

SAWTELLE. Give me ten minutes and I'll give you your answer.

DAWSON. Just as you say. Don't let me influ'nce you. It's all the same to me either way.

(Exit, C.)

(SAWTELLE goes to his desk in deep thought, marked by an impatient expression. After a moment, BESSIE enters, C.)

BESSIE. Oh, dad, I've just been talking to Emily, and I must go right back. They need so many things. I want you to promise me, dad, that you will pay all the girls the minimum wage. I don't want all the fine things we've got, if we have to cheat those girls to get them.

SAWTELLE. Cheat? Bessie, that doesn't sound well.

BESSIE. I know, dad. I don't mean that you'd do anything purposely you thought was wrong, but—but—anyway, please do that much for me.

SAWTELLE. Bessie, did you see a big, burly fellow waiting outside?

BESSIE. Why, yes. Who is he?

SAWTELLE. He's that inspector from the labor bureau. He says if we comply with the law the department won't lodge the complaint.

BESSIE (*clapping her hands*). Good! Why, of course we'll do it. We don't need any old department to tell us what's right, anyway. And you won't be bothered going to court or anything.

SAWTELLE. I haven't decided what answer to give him.

BESSIE. Haven't decided? Dad! After hearing about Emily! I'm almost ashamed of you.

SAWTELLE. A man ought to run his own business.

BESSIE. So you will, dad, so you will. Come, don't be obstinate.

SAWTELLE. Obstinacy is a good trait.

BESSIE. Sometimes.

SAWTELLE. I don't like the idea of getting up in court.

BESSIE. Listen, dad, do you like the idea of Emily?

SAWTELLE. No, I don't. If I had known about her, I wouldn't have allowed it.

BESSIE. Dad, you don't know how many Emilys you have working for you.

SAWTELLE. I hate to give in to those fellows.

BESSIE. You won't let that prevent your doing what's right.

SAWTELLE. Whatever I do, I do on your account, not on theirs. (*He throws open the door.*) Dawson! (*Dawson enters indifferently.*) My partner and I have talked this matter over——

DAWSON (*uninterestedly*). Yes?

SAWTELLE. And we've decided to pay the minimum wage and make the other changes you mention.

DAWSON. Uh-huh.

SAWTELLE. Not because you say so, or because a fool unconstitutional law says so, but because—well, because we do as we please around here, that's why.

DAWSON. Just as you say. I'm not particular. Cuts me out of a trip to Belleville, though. 'N' see that you do it, b'cause I'll drop in when you ain't looking. R'member, I come like a thief in the night. Well, so long.

(*SAWTELLE bows him out, c. At the door SAWTELLE sees BARTLEY and pulls him inside.*)

SAWTELLE. What did you come back for?

(*Comes down R.*)

BARTLEY. To get the news, sir. (*Comes down R. c.*)

SAWTELLE. You've got too much news already.

BESSIE (*down R.*). Father, dear, Frank is right. Tell him what you have done.

SAWTELLE. I won't tell him a thing.

BESSIE. Then I will. We have agreed to conform to the law in every particular, and Mr. Dawson has agreed not to make a complaint.

BARTLEY. Good! I can't tell you how glad I am. Excuse me a moment. (*He goes to door, c., and calls.*) Jim! Come in here.

(*Enter HOLMAN and SCHULTZ, c.*)

HOLMAN (*taking pencil and paper from pocket*). What's the news, Frank?

BARTLEY. The best news the "Free Lance" ever printed. Dawson will hold up his report for ten days.

HOLMAN (*writing*). Fine. So your telegram worked, hey?

BARTLEY. Never mind that. The real news is that Sawtelle will pay his girls a minimum of seven dollars, and make a lot of improvements. Get the facts from the general manager later. Make a big feature of it.

HOLMAN. Hurray! (*To SAWTELLE.*) This'll be the best ad you ever had, sir, and it won't cost you a cent.

BARTLEY. And kill that other story. Don't let it get out.

SCHULTZ. Mein gracious—after I got him all set up in long primer, and ——

HOLMAN. Come along, Schultzy. You know you're tickled to death.

SCHULTZ. Such doings! Ach, such doings!

(*Exit HOLMAN and SCHULTZ, C.*)

BESSIE. So we aren't so horrid, after all, and you won't have to print any head-lines about us.

BARTLEY. All there will be to print will be about the big improvements in Sawtelle's store. Mr. Sawtelle, this is the biggest thing you have ever done.

SAWTELLE (*shortly*). Thank her, not me.

BARTLEY. I'll thank you both. Good-bye.

BESSIE. Good-bye, Frank. We'll see you up at the house to-night, won't we? You have an engagement, remember.

BARTLEY (*surprised and pleased*). May I? Will I be welcome?

BESSIE. Surely you will. Why not?

BARTLEY. I didn't know. I thought ——

SAWTELLE. You thought maybe I wouldn't let you, eh? Well, Bessie runs her own affairs. Another thing, young man, now that this is all over, I like you better than ever. You're obstinate—so'm I. I presume we'll have a lot of trouble, one time and another, you and I, but I like you. I wouldn't give two figs for a fellow that wasn't obstinate.

(*SAWTELLE turns toward his desk. BARTLEY puts his arm around BESSIE and moves to kiss her as the curtain drops.*)

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